APATHY OF GOVERNMENT AS TO LOCAL IMPROVEMENTS.

The *Westminster Review*, in an article to which we have already referred, remarks justly:—"It is yet but imperfectly understood that the test of all good government is local improvement. The spirit of British legislation is not comprehended by judging of it exclusively from the debates of the House of Commons. An intelligent foreigner visiting this country would find the data he requires less in the newspapers than in the streets. What is the true end of all social institutions but the social interest? What other meaning should have state policy, than that the people constituting the state should be well fed, well clothed, well lodged, well educated, and well protected from every calamity that human prudence can avert? A walk from Whitechapel to Westminster, and a few inquiries by the way, will explain to a stranger how far this object has been effected better than whole volumes of Hansard: and yet so little are the practical results of legislation thought of, that when two noblemen, a year or two back, accompanied Dr. Southwood Smith to Spitalfields, to see with their own eyes the state of the poor, the fact was noted at the time as a marvel, and rather as a work of supererogation on the part of lawgivers than as a branch of duty.

The reports of numerous commissions of inquiry have awakened a general expectation of extensive measures of usefulness connected with home administration; but the little that has yet been done shews to a lamentable extent how far more engrossing are questions of party conflict, and the old worn out theories of diplomacy, than any consideration of practicable benefits to the people, which might be realized by government almost without an effort.

Here are we, two millions of human beings, crowded upon a little spot five miles square, whence, as from a mighty heart, an impulse is communicated to every corner of the globe;—inhabitants of a city which, from its influence in human affairs, will be remembered when even Rome shall be forgotten; and what does this government of ours, or the statesmen composing it,—busy with the cares of an empire upon which the sun never sets,—do for *us*? Occupied with the regulations of Hong Kong, and the defence of British interests on the banks of the Columbia,—what share of the watchful vigilance of a British cabinet is enjoyed by *us*, here, on the banks of the Thames, in the streets comprising two hundred and fifty-one thousand houses round St. Paul's?

To answer the inquiry would be only to afford another illustration of the aptness of a large portion of mankind, while taking the warmest interest in the affairs of their neighbours, to forget the maxim of 'look at home.' But we doubt whether the history of the world would afford an example of the capital of a great nation more neglected in the national councils, less indebted to government aid for its growth and progress, as a place of civilized abode, than London.

In ancient times metropolitan improvement was an object for the ambition of kings. The glory of their capital was considered as their own. 'Is not this great Babylon that I have builded?' was an exclamation of pride, but of pride not unreasonably directed; and if Babylon corresponded with the description given of it by Herodotus, we may pardon the impulse of vain glory which turned the brain of Nebuchadnezzar. Egypt found in its Pharaohs,—Athens in a Pericles,—Rome in a succession of emperors,—architects and sculptors devoted to great structural works of public utility and the embellishment of their native cities; England only a George the Fourth. To no other British monarch does it appear to have occurred that great kings might be less worthily employed than in planning streets; or that if palaces and churches were worth building, their environs should be something more than a mere province of brick; and of late few persons of high influence or station appear to have troubled themselves with a thought about the matter. The royal patronage of Nash was the stimulus to which we may trace almost every improvement of importance since projected, or now being carried into effect. Regent-street, and the Regent's-park, created a taste for a better disposition of streets and buildings than had before existed, or than had then been commenced in Somers-town, and established the precedent to which we owe the entire renovation of many parts of old London, the palatial magnificence of Eaton and Belgrave-squares, the improvements on the estate of the Bishop of London, and the more varied and picturesque squares and crescents of the Kensington-park estate at Notting-hill.

Since the death of George the Fourth, Government has taken no share in the initiation of corresponding measures; but the impulse given has been sustained by the public, and in some instances reluctant consents have been wrung from chancellors of the exchequer in aid of the general movement. The apathy, however, of Government upon all questions connected with either municipal organization or structural improvement, has been shewn during the present session in the debates upon public cemeteries, the window duties, and various important suggestions of the sanitary commissions; and is exemplified by the history of the private bill now before the House for a new line of street between Westminster Abbey and the Vauxhall Bridge-road. We allude to the bill lately introduced with the sanction of the Metropolitan Improvement Commissioners; and which appears likely to be the first fruits of their three years' deliberation. This bill is only to give effect to a project *twenty years old*, and which obtained the recommendation of a committee of the House of Commons as far back as 1832. Fifty thousand pounds (for which a dozen different projectors have been quarrelling) are to be voted in aid of the line; and this is all that Government has done from that time to the present for the improvement of Westminster, south of Pall-Mall, beyond rebuilding the Houses of Parliament on perhaps the worst site that could have been found in England for a similar edifice; a mistake which has led to more money being sunk in the mud of the river to secure a foundation than would have purchased the fee-simple of the whole mass of ruinous third and fourth-rate tenements between Millbank and Buckingham Palace.

It is singular that the immediate neighbourhood of royalty should be the worst built, and the worst drained district of the metropolis, and yet, now that St. Giles's has disappeared, so it is; and streets of infamous reputation, which it is scarcely safe or prudent to traverse even in open day, form the only avenues to Westminster Abbey, from Belgrave-square and Buckingham Palace.

A Government that would tolerate the Alsmony at its very doors cannot of course be otherwise than indifferent to the state of Wapping, Rotherhithe, or Spitalfields; and we need not wonder that the promise of a Thames embankment has hitherto proved illusory. In no other capital in Europe are the approaches of a noble river built up to the water's edge. To throw its banks open to the public between Blackfriars and Westminster bridges less money is required than would suffice for any one of the two hundred railroads now before Parliament; and Government cannot devise the ways and means. While perplexed with this difficulty, it can yet spend its millions to maintain the balance of power in Syria, to frighten Russia from Affghanistan, and coerce the ameers of Scinde into a respect for treaties.

At the present moment we are told that British interests require protection on the banks of the Columbia, nine month's sail from Greenwich. We complain not that such protection should be afforded, but lament that none can be spared for Greenwich itself, one of the suburbs of the metropolis. And yet what Londoner would sacrifice Greenwich Park for all the prairies in the Oregon territory, or Shooter's Hill for the whole range of the Rocky mountains? It will be happy for England when the physical and moral wants of her people shall obtain a tenth part of the attention which statesmen have hitherto bestowed upon the conquest and defence of distant and profitless dependencies. London in its most fashionable localities, west of Regent-street, gives but a faint indication of what the whole metropolis might become, and with it every town in England, if the duty of promoting public health, and of checking all abuses of local administration were made cabinet questions, in lieu of many others which absorb the time and energies of party leaders.

The imaginary difficulty of providing funds for local improvements is only an evidence of the want of earnestness in the will to provide them. The local revenue of the metropolis, derived from rates and trust estates, for public objects, is *three millions sterling!* Of these funds we believe a sixth are now wastefully or uselessly applied; but whether a sixth or sixteenth, no Government gives itself the trouble to inquire, and the existing municipal organization of the metropolis, with its innumerable vestries, boards of commissioners, perpetual churchwardens, and irresponsible trustees,—its parishes of twenty houses, and parishes of twenty thousand houses,—each parish with its separate staff, and its separate Acts of Parliament, establishing different laws in different streets,—remains to this day a scandal to the legislation of the nineteenth century."

Correspondence.

NICHES IN BRICKWORK.

SIR,—I am employed as foreman of bricklayers on a rather extensive building, where four brick niches are required to be executed in gauged work. They are to be semicircular on the plan, each three feet in diameter, and the heads are to be semicircular likewise: consequently they will form, when done, a quarter of a globe. Now, never having been called upon to execute such a work as the above, I am rather at a loss how to proceed properly with it. Perhaps some one of your numerous correspondents will be so good as to undertake to inform me, through the medium of your excellent paper, how I am to get the moulds, and the proper method of execution, so that I may be able to make a good and neat job of them. I am, Sir, &c.,

P. W.

SETTING OUT RAILWAY CURVES.

SIR,—Can any of your numerous correspondents inform me of the general method adopted in setting out a railway curve, and the rule by which the curve is found upon the ground?—and oblige, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

AMATEUR.

Miscellanea.

DISCOVERY OF A STONE COFFIN AND SKELETONS.—On Thursday week the workmen employed by Sir Wm. S. R. Cockburn, bart., and Sir Henry Rivers, in making the new road between St. Stephen's and St. Saviour's church, found a tumulus; and, beneath a domed arch, of rude but substantial masonry, there was a stone coffin, containing portions of a skeleton, and surrounded by numerous bones. This is square in form, hewn out of a solid block of sandstone, resembling that so plentifully abounding on Farleigh Down, and must have been occupied by a person of good stature, the excavation measuring five feet eleven inches, and the entire length being about seven feet. The dead was enclosed with a massive stone cover; and further security was afforded by a vaulted arched chamber, reared above the coffin, the top of which was only 18 inches beneath the surface. The workmanship of the entire sepulchre was rude, but of a massive description; the arch alone contained two waggon-loads of stone, while the weight of the coffin could not have been less than one ton. The only facts which can lead to a conjecture as to the date of interment, are the discovery of a coin lying on the top of the coffin, and of a spur which was found close to one of the adjacent skeletons. The coin has been examined by Mr. Harris, of Southgate-street, by whom it is pronounced to be the third brass coin of the Emperor Valens, A.D. 328, and U.C. 1081. It was found beneath a fragment of Roman brick, and had apparently been placed in this position as a clue to any who might in after days light upon the tomb. The coin and brick have been placed in the Museum, Terrace Walk. The entire spot apparently abounds with the decaying traces of human mortality. We are informed that no fewer than thirty skeletons, or fragments of skeletons, have been brought to light. Many of these were perhaps interred in wooden coffins; this we infer from the fact that large iron square-headed nails lay among the bones. The remains have been re-interred not far from the spot in which they were discovered.—*Bath Chronicle.*

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